

CIO

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IDCU Replacement

By: Ken Thompson, OI&T, Office of Telecommunications

Efforts of the Integrated Data Communications Utility (IDCU) replacement team came to fruition in February when, following six months of rigorous research and analysis, the team identified Sprint as the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) vendor of choice for VA's wide area network (WAN) under the GSA FTS 2001 contract. This selection is contingent on VA and Sprint coming to an agreement on pricing and transitional issues for the migration of VA's current wide area network.

Sprint's program features bring VA an innovative, dependable and customer-oriented networking solution. This is a public network, from which VA should benefit from economies of scale. The diverse bandwidth requirements of VA range from lower-speed frame relay network technology for large file transfers, to high-speed ATM (asynchronous transfer mode) and SONET (synchronous optical network) technology for telemedicine, imaging and video applications. Additionally, VA requires the survivability and dependability of its nationwide telecommunications infrastructure. Sprint's managed network services will provide VA with real-time monitoring to ensure that the best network performance and operations are provided. The new network will become VA's primary corporate-wide telecommunications system and a critical part of supporting medical and benefit services to our nation's Veterans.

Much work remains to accomplish the transition from VA's current IDCU private network to VA's new WAN on the Sprint public network. The team, initially assembled to replace the IDCU, now takes on the complex tasks associated with analyzing and resolving technical issues, and planning and implementing migration and service cut over to Sprint's public network. We will continue to report to you on the accomplishments of VA's WAN Transition team in future issues of this newsletter.

YEAR 2000

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THE CIO SCENE

By: *Harold F. Gracey, Jr., Acting
VA Chief Information Officer*



The Secretary has approved the concepts in the “One VA Vision of Information Technology Enhanced Customer Service” (IT Vision), and charged me with developing an implementation plan for the IT Vision. The concepts, which fall into four categories—Customer Support, Internal Data Sharing and Exchange, External Data Sharing and Exchange, and the Customer Service IT Infrastructure, demonstrate ways in which current and emerging technology can be used to support VA’s business operations to meet the One VA goal. All Administrations and key staff offices provided information and ideas to the Vision and have expressed support for it.

The IT Vision identifies concepts for a number of supporting projects, some of which are already underway. Customer Service includes telephone-based Veteran Service Representatives (VSRs), telephone and Internet-based self-service, and Internet e-mail between customers and VA, to provide general and veteran-specific information to the customer in the most convenient way. The Customer Service IT Infrastructure encompasses a number of concepts that are needed to support Customer Service. They are a common Customer Service Environment (CSE) graphical user interface to make it easy for the VSRs to gain access to information; a CSE transaction broker and interface engine to allow queries and updates to production information systems; an expert system for determination of potential benefits eligibility; and digital certificates for authentication of self-service users.

Internal Data Sharing and Exchange concepts include an authoritative copy of record for customer identification data; electronic imaging, indexed storage and VA-wide retrieval on demand of claims folders and medical records; widespread use of video-conferencing; and workflow automation for process integration and standardization. These concepts allow

for information to be readily available to VA staff within and across Administrations.

External Data Sharing and Exchange encompasses the electronic exchange of data with DoD—medical records and personnel data about veterans and their dependents that is pertinent to qualifying and servicing them as VA customers—as well as other government agencies. It also includes such concepts as direct deposit of all customer benefit payments and paperless exchange of data with commercial partners.

While the focus of the IT Vision is on customer service, there will be benefits to VA staff as well. Having medical records and benefits information available electronically will result in less time spent hunting for the paper records. Having all this information easily accessible means better responses to a customer’s inquiry and fewer callbacks. Receiving information electronically, either from other agencies, or from forms the customer has completed on-line, will decrease the need to key in data and also decrease the errors that result from this method of data entry. Databases will become more accurate due to this and due to easy updating of basic information by the customer.

I plan to establish a steering committee to oversee implementation of these concepts and to ensure that current related projects consider the needs of the other Administrations and staff offices. The Committee will have representatives from the Administrations and key staff offices. It will have a business focus rather than IT to assure that the technology supports the business processes.

Copies of the Vision are being sent to headquarters’ offices as well as all field facilities. The IT Vision is available on the Web at <http://www.va.gov/oirm/cio/vision/index.htm>. Additional copies may be obtained from the Office of Information and Technology, or by calling 202-273-8672.

YEAR 2000

Year 2000 Compliance for Desktop Systems

By: Steve Ciccarelli, OI&T, Information Technology Support Service

Much has been written about Year 2000 (Y2K) problems primarily from the viewpoint of mainframe computer systems. This reflects our absolute dependence on mainframe computer systems for functions like banking, air traffic control, and defense weapons. These computer systems are unquestionably critical and our nation's well being is clearly at stake. Less has been written about desktop computer systems. Consequently the public's knowledge of desktop computer system Y2K issues has lagged and many potential Year 2000 problems are not receiving the attention they should.

At VA Central Office (VACO), the Information Technology Support Service (ITSS), Office of Information and Technology, is the manager of the VACO campus area network and has tried to investigate all facets of the Y2K problem, which can effect desktop computer systems.

ITSS has identified three (3) major areas that must be correct to ensure that full Y2K compliance is met.

- ◆ The PC, specifically, the Basic Input/Output System (BIOS), must be able to rollover to (or set) and retain a date of January 1, 2000. The PC must also be able to correctly handle the leap day, February 29, 2000.

- ◆ All operating system and application system software must correctly handle dates, which can be in either the twentieth or twenty first century, and again

properly handle the leap day. Most recent operating system and application software is Y2K "compliant." In many cases, however, software is "compliant with minor issues." Without software upgrades (i.e., Y2K bug fixes and patches) problems are still likely to occur.

- ◆ The final requirement is that dates in data files use date formatting so that there is no chance that the application software will misinterpret which century dates with 2-digit years fall. Unfortunately, each software package has different "rules" for determining which century a 2-digit year date entry belongs.

For the assessment phase, ITSS is using a commercial Y2K assessment software package which

VA's Y2K Progress

VA has made significant progress in mitigating the Year 2000 impact on our information systems. VA has completed the renovation of its mission critical computer software applications to be Year 2000 compliant, including all payment-related applications and applications supporting health care.

Ninety-seven percent of these applications have been implemented into production and are successfully processing Year 2000 dates. VA has implemented applications supporting health care, compensation and pension, insurance, vocational rehabilitation, education, loan guaranty, financial management, personnel, national cemeteries and corporate administrative functions (financial services and payroll). VA is on schedule to complete the implementation of the remaining applications by March 1999.

In recognition of our Year 2000 progress, Congressman Stephen Horn, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology, Committee on Government Reform, awarded the grade of A- to VA.

checks the PC BIOS, reports operating system and application software Y2K issues, and uses a data scanner to check data files for possible 2-digit year problems.

For the remediation phase, ITSS is using a multifaceted approach. First, ITSS will be applying software fixes for BIOS problems or BIOS upgrades for PCs that cannot hold a 1/1/2000 date or rollover to it. Second, ITSS is conducting a complete review and upgrade of operating system and application software to ensure that the latest service releases (with Y2K and other bug fixes) are applied. Third, a data

scanner is being utilized to allow customers to check their data files for 2-digit years which could be “misinterpreted” by the application software.

ITSS technicians believe that they have thoroughly investigated the Y2K desktop problem and have developed a comprehensive approach to minimize the number of problems on the desktop. While no one is naïve enough to suggest that there will be no problems next January, we believe the problems can be minimized and impact on daily operations minor. Indeed, the ITSS is confident that January 1, 2000, will be the start of a Happy New Year for both our customers and our technicians.



VA I-TIPS Tracks Capital Investment Dollars

By: Helen Mysiw, OI&T, IRM Planning, Acquisition and Security Service

Over the past few years, government has seen a legislative revolution aimed at improving mission performance through more effective strategic, financial and acquisition management. One significant piece of legislation is the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996, which seeks to improve mission performance by requiring agencies to clearly define and implement a capital planning and investment control process for assessing and selecting information technology (IT) investments. Clinger-Cohen has introduced a level of rigor into how agencies approach the selection and management of IT initiatives, and has encouraged agencies to rethink how they do their business.

The Information Technology Investment Portfolio System (I-TIPS) is a web-based information and portfolio management system that will assist VA with developing and managing its capital investments. As part of the Capital Investment Process, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implementation will expand the use of I-TIPS beyond IT investments and include all capital assets such as enhanced-use leases, leases, infrastructure, medical and nonmedical equipment. Due to the wide range of investments to

be managed using I-TIPS, a working group will bring forward any issues and review system tailoring to ensure a successful implementation of I-TIPS and VA's FY 2001 Capital Planning and Investment Process.

I-TIPS will provide its users with a robust set of functionality to support the select, control, evaluate and reporting phases of the VA capital planning and investment process. As the system matures, I-TIPS will help VA to build financially sound portfolios of capital investments by balancing expected costs, risks and returns, and institute greater accountability through its collaboration capabilities.

The system has four modules:

- ◆ The Selection Module allows users to develop cost-benefit analyses and track risk data related to investment decisions.
- ◆ The Control Module tracks developments in systems as they are being implemented.
- ◆ The Evaluation Module collects and analyzes project status data.
- ◆ The Enhanced Analysis and Reporting Module allows users to do more extensive analyses and reports.

New Orleans VAMC and VARO Receive Scissors Award

By: Fernando O. Rivera, VAMC, New Orleans, LA,



In early February, the VA Medical Center (VAMC) and VBA Regional Office (VARO) in New Orleans were recognized by the Deputy Secretary with a Scissors Award for a joint telecommunications initiative which saved the Department of Veterans Affairs thousands of dollars.

In October 1997 the VAMC Director contacted the VARO Director to discuss the possibilities of a joint telephone venture. The hospital was completing a hospital upgrade and VBA needed to upgrade their 12-year old outdated telephone system. A joint project would save VBA thousands of dollars on a telephone upgrade that was desperately needed.

The initiative had several goals:

1. Combine services to one telephone system;
2. Save telecommunications dollars; and
3. Improve customer service.

Prior to this project the VARO's telephone system would not allow the transfer of calls between the VAMC, VARO and the Baton Rouge Outpatient Clinic (BROPC). The VARO's telephone system did not have an auto-attendant (which would speed up answering of customer calls) or voice mail features.

Because of this project, the VARO did not have to purchase a new telephone system at a cost of approximately \$374,814 (including a new cable plant) or upgrade their existing system for \$150,000. Instead, the VARO became a remote mode or tenant on VAMC's telephone switch for \$106,000. Although there is a very small savings in monthly recurring cost to the VARO (\$570), transfer functionality is now available between the VAMC, VARO and BROPC. Additional features include voice mail, auto-attendant and Interactive Voice Response (IVR). These improvements have given our customers *One-Stop-Shopping* even though the facilities are not co-located on common grounds. Our customers no longer are required to hang up and redial a seven-digit number if they have contacted the wrong facility. Our customers can now be easily transferred between the VAMC, VARO and BROPC. This has greatly improved customer service. The VARO now has the same functions as the VAMC and BROPC. In addition, the main telephone number switch will be expanding services that will include an Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) which can service not only the VAMC but also the VARO.

This initiative provides a common capital investment for the Department of Veterans Affairs and offers greatly improved VA medical and benefits services through state-of-the-art telecommunications services to our customers. This joint venture is an excellent example of ONE VA.

Editor's Note: This same group received a Hammer Award from Vice President Al Gore and the National Performance Review on March 9, 1999.

Microsoft Windows 2000 Beta Testing

By: Nelda Cook, OI&T, Information Technology Support Service



Microsoft is developing a new operating system to replace NT 4.0. Originally called NT 5.0, the product is now called Windows 2000.

On August 6, the VA Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council modified the charter of the VA Nationwide NT Naming Convention Work Group to include planning for the migration to Microsoft Windows 2000. The work group was renamed the VA NT Enterprise Work Group. This work group is tasked, in part, with exploring and addressing all issues related to planning for and migrating to Windows 2000.

On February 8, 1999, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology issued interim guidance on Windows 2000 beta testing. Some key points are listed below. The full text of the memo is at the VA NT Enterprise site at <http://yawww.vairm.vaco.va.gov> (Intranet only), along with other published documents pertaining to the VA NT Enterprise.

The VA NT Enterprise network is currently a large association of account master domains and local resource domains that are locally administered. To maintain interoperability, the VA NT Enterprise Network Work Group, with its cross-organizational representation, developed a set of naming conventions. In addition, it uses weekly meetings and electronic mail dialogs to address issues that threaten the VA NT Enterprise.

Unlike previous versions of the Windows NT operating system, Windows 2000 is an Enterprise-level operating system. It must be designed and implemented from the top down. Therefore, organizations cannot develop and implement their own Windows 2000 domain structures and then expect to connect to the VA Enterprise network. Any group interested in beta testing Windows 2000 should coordinate with the VA NT Enterprise Work Group to share information and participate in the planning stages for the migration. Mr. Ray Poore chairs the Work Group. He is available on 202-273-6520.

Windows 2000 is a beta product and is not supported by the Microsoft site license or services such as Microsoft Premiere Support. Its presence within the VA Enterprise network may cause instabilities that interfere with VA's normal business processing, and Microsoft may refuse to address these instabilities because of the presence of the beta product. Therefore, it is imperative that any testing of Windows 2000 beta products be done on a private network, one that is physically isolated from the VA Enterprise wide area network and all local area networks.

Currently, there is not sufficient information to outline a complete Windows 2000 domain overview. However, as servers, devices and customers are migrated to Windows 2000, all VA elements will be expected to comply with all rules, schedules and naming conventions included in the Windows 2000 migration plan developed by the VA NT Enterprise Work Group. There will be no grand-fathering of preexisting Windows 2000 systems.

FMS Online Help

By: George Rasor, OI&T, Austin
Automation Center



During December 1998, the Austin Automation Center (AAC) released the latest version of the FMSGUI (Version 2.3). FMSGUI is a Windows-based application that acts as a front end to the legacy FMS S/390 Enterprise Server application. It allows FMS customers to transform their cumbersome and labor-intensive S/390 Enterprise Server assignments into easy-to-follow Windows-like tasks. It also enhances initial access to FMS, navigation throughout the system, data entry facilities, and querying capabilities. FMSGUI dramatically reduces training costs and increases productivity. Memorizing FMS table names and learning FMS document commands become unnecessary.

Get the Software

Download the FMSGUI software today from the AAC's Intranet Home Page (<http://152.125.188.38/austinet/>). It is free of charge and is available to all

FMS customers. The baseline version of FMSGUI supports document entry functions, purchasing queries, travel queries, accounts receivable queries, budget queries, and general ledger queries. New features include an online help facility that permits customers to access help information on-the-fly. Don't forget to check the download site on a regular basis for the newest version of the software. If downloading from the Intranet is not an option, AAC staff can File Transfer Protocol (FTP) the software to you or even send it to you in an e-mail message.

Installing the Software

Be sure to install the software on your c:\ root directory (this is the default). After the installation has completed, an FMSGUI icon will appear inside the FMS program box. Feel free to create a shortcut to this icon and add it to your desktop.

System Requirements

- ◆ Computer: 486/33 with 8MB of RAM
- ◆ Disk Space: 8MB
- ◆ LAN connectivity to the Austin mainframe
- ◆ Windows NT, Windows 95, Windows 98 or Windows 3.1

AAC Provides Outstanding Customer Support for DSS

By: Judy Sine, OI&T, Austin Automation Center

The Austin Automation Center (AAC) Decision Support System (DSS) team reflects on the events and accomplishments of 1998 and looks forward to the challenges and new assignments to support DSS in 1999.

1998

Performance Enhancements and Improvements

- ◆ Processing improvements were implemented that resulted in less central processing unit (CPU) usage. This translated into reductions in CPU charges and elapsed job time.
- ◆ File maintenance was streamlined, reducing storage needs and associated costs.
- ◆ DSSMAIN functionality was expanded. The financial summary reports option was added to make

additional pertinent financial data available. The job results option provides job information that includes the status of jobs and elapsed times which allows customers to better manage and coordinate Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) workload.

DSS Training

- ◆ “Management Use” and “Train the Trainer” courses were taught in Austin. The AAC staff takes pride in providing outstanding administrative and technical support for Veterans Health Administration (VHA) classes.

- ◆ The M204 Year 2000 (Y2K)-compliant database was installed in production.

1999

Year 2000

- ◆ Y2K testing and implementation will be completed in second quarter FY 1999.

Performance Enhancements and Additions

- ◆ Long-Term Care (LTC) enhancements will be implemented. This will then allow prior years' medical data to be archived. Smaller online files will be a boon to job processing performance.

- ◆ Nightly batch processing will be further improved via facility specific processing. Implementation of this effort will result in simultaneous processing of jobs, i.e., “doing more in less time.”

- ◆ Implementation Round 6 sites will be migrated into their respective VISN regions.

AAC Customer Survey

By: Marnie Furbish, OI&T, Austin Automation Center

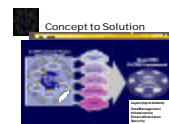
The AAC conducted its third annual comprehensive customer survey during the latter half of 1998, with compiled results reported in January 1999. A professional firm under contract to the AAC designed and conducted the survey, then reported the results. The survey consisted of two phases: a qualitative, personal interview phase and a quantitative written phase. The first phase focused on 18

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) executives as key AAC customers in which a representative of the survey contractor interviewed them in person or by telephone. The second phase of the survey focused on AAC customers who are project/program managers/decision-makers, and on end-user customers. During this phase, approximately 100 decision-makers and 5,000 end-users were invited to participate with electronic surveys. The survey results were analyzed by the contractor, reported to the AAC management team, and will be released in early April to those who participated in the survey.

An action plan has been developed to address customer concerns identified in the survey. In conjunction with the survey action plan, the AAC is also pursuing additional methods to determine levels of customer satisfaction on a continuous basis and will begin implementation in the early spring.

GCPR - A Virtual Link Between Health Info Systems

By: Jane Parsons, VHA, GCPR Framework Project



The Government Computer-Based Patient Record (GCPR) membership includes three agencies, VA, the Department of Defense (DoD) and Indian Health Service (IHS). The agencies participating in the GCPR Coordinating Committee (CC) have a history of resource sharing and are now at a juncture where substantial advances may be realized by leveraging technology and standardization. The GCPR Framework Project is the first interagency clinical systems project of the GCPR Coordinating Committee. The GCPR Framework effort is bringing together different organizations with a common need – the ability to share health information among federal health care agencies. Establishing data sharing among them will expand the continuum of care to better serve the population of beneficiaries that the separate agencies share.

All of the agencies participating in the GCPR Framework Project have made significant investments in computerized clinical information systems. Although the systems evolved from the same parent system, they have deviated enough to make information sharing a challenging task. Today there is no standard mechanism in place to transfer information between these systems. With the growing reliance on electronic versus paper medical records and the push to increase sharing arrangements to care for patients, the GCPR Framework presents a very promising solution in the evolution of future information systems collaboration.

The GCPR CC also has created a management structure with a core Project Team staff with staff from each agency to manage day to day activities. Peter Groen, VHA's Deputy ACIO for Business Enterprise Solutions and Technology Service (BEST) is serving as the Acting Project Manager. Other Project Office dedicated staff include Dr. Janet Martino of the DoD Clinical Business Area and CDR. Jim McCain of Indian Health Service. VA will also be supporting the project with a GCPR Lead Clinician, Dr. David Kentsmith.

More detailed information about the project is provided at: <http://www.gcpr.gov>.

Web-Enabling Master Veteran Record

By: Marnie Furbish, OI&T, Austin Automation Center



The “Web-Enabling MVR” project was nominated for the Government Information Technology Services (GITS) Board’s Center of Excellence for Information Technology (CEIT) and has been selected as one of the finalists for showcasing quality applications. A CEIT evaluation team selected 16 Web-enabled applications, including MVR, which have resulted in significant savings and/or process improvements for the organization. The Austin Automation Center (AAC)

MVR staff demonstrated the product at the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association’s “Virtual Government Conference” CEIT showcase in Washington February 1999.

The AAC will also take the customer outreach exhibit booth to the Virtual Government Conference and join the other Federal fee-for-service organizations and private sector firms on the exhibit floor. This will be the AAC’s first venture into a DOD-sponsored information technology conference as an exhibitor.

Information Technology—What Is IT

By: Tim Weigel, OI&T, IRM Planning, Acquisition & Security Service

I’m sure most folks are aware that VA has implemented a capital investment process. This process involves a deliberative review of major budgetary initiatives aimed at buying capital materials—buildings, other types of real estate, long-term leases, and information technology (IT) both hardware and software, having a useful life of two years or more. This process reviews IT actions that are high visibility or crosscutting and meet or exceed specific dollar thresholds.

There is also another type of review IT must undergo. This review applies to any procurement action exceeding \$250,000. Prior to executing such a purchase, approval must be sought and obtained from the Department’s Chief Information Officer. This applies regardless of the action being subject to capital investment review or not.

This brings up the question posed by the title of this article—what is IT anyway? In general, if it creates, stores, moves, manipulates, or destroys information, it could well be IT. But this definition is rather imprecise. For example, your desk stores information (for some of us, it’s quite a bit of information)—on top, in drawers, on shelves, etc. Does that make the desk IT? Of course not. So a more precise definition is in order.

Fortunately, a more precise definition exists. It is provided in statute. The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 provides that IT is “any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment that is used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information by [an] executive agency. For purposes of the preceding sentence, equipment is used by an executive agency directly or is used by a contractor under a contract with the executive agency which (i) requires the use of such equipment, or (ii) requires the use, to a significant extent, of such equipment in the performance of a service or the furnishing of a product.” [PL 104-106, Sec. 5002]

There, we have more precision, but that’s still difficult to understand. Plus there’s still room for interpretation—for example, a copier automatically acquires information, stores it while it makes copies, manipulates the information (makes replications of the originals), manages information (by producing multiples of the original), controls how the copies are produced, displays progress and results (the copies), etc. But is a copier IT? Most folks would say no, and I would agree. So if the common sense definition isn’t helpful, and there is room for interpretation in the legal definition provided, how do we ascertain what, precisely, is IT?

Fortunately, the Clinger-Cohen Act provides some help. Clinger-Cohen goes on to say: “The term ‘information technology’ includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar procedures, services (including support services), and related resources.” It does not (also according to Clinger-Cohen) include contractor-acquired materiel that is obtained incidental to a Federal contract.

Now we’re getting somewhere. We all have a fairly good handle as to what computers are. Ancillary equipment is anything attached to a computer (disk drives, modems, whatever). Software and firmware are the instructions that allow the computer to operate. Services, support services, and related resources are contractor support activities that allow computers to function (and a couple of other things I’ll touch on in a moment). So it would appear we are closing in on a way to determine if something is IT, or not.

What remains is a common sense way of looking at something, or a project that will produce ‘a

something’ and quickly ascertaining whether it is IT. Taking the initial general view of IT, and coupling it with the legal definitions provided for us, we can conclude the following—something is IT if it involves:

1. The automated creation, manipulation, storage or destruction of information (Manipulation includes movement, control, display, changing, etc., all of the other things mentioned in Clinger-Cohen);

2. Hardware or software (including ‘firmware’) that performs the previous item;

3. Any supplies needed to perform item #1;

4. Contractor support needed to operate the hardware and software in item #2 (This also includes contractor support to plan out projects and manage the development of projects—the two items I alluded to earlier);

5. Any related resources—these would include such things as LANS/WANS, telephone systems, satellite communications, cellular communications.

All of these things are IT. And any of these IT things are subject to the review requirements mentioned in the first two paragraphs of this article. It is my hope that this discussion helped clarify in many of our collective minds the answer to the originally posed question—What is IT anyway? But, try as I might, I’m sure there will still be uncertainties; if there are, I’m willing to work with organizations to sort these things out.

Enhanced Web Access to Time Sharing at Austin

By: Ann Peticolas, OI&T, Austin
Automation Center



Austin Automation Center (AAC) customers can use the Intranet to access their information on the AAC S/390 Enterprise Server and get to Time Sharing Option (TSO), Customer Information Control System (CICS), WYLBUR, and other VAccess time sharing

applications via the IBM Host On-Demand software product. There is a link to both versions of Host On-Demand on the aUSTinet site at <http://152.125.188.38/austinet>. A minimum Internet Explorer level of 3.02 is required for the old version.

Host On-Demand was upgraded to Version 3 in February to add such capabilities as screen printing, cut-and-paste to other Windows applications, and extended 3270 terminal attributes (used by some applications, such as PAID OLDE). In order to take advantage of the enhanced features of the new version, customers need an up-to-date browser release level (Microsoft Internet Explorer browser should be at 4.0 level with Service Pack 1, or your Netscape Navigator browser should be at 4.07 level). Updates to browser software can be downloaded from the Microsoft or Netscape Web sites. To allow customers time to upgrade their browsers at their convenience, the older version of Host On-Demand will continue to be available for several months.

AAC Awarded Development of National Enrollment Database (NED)

By: Jack Savoy, OI&T, Austin Automation Center

In October 1996, Congress passed Public Law 104-262, the Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996. The purpose of this law was to improve the cost effectiveness of and simplify rules for providing health care to veterans by eliminating the distinction between hospital and outpatient care outlined in the old eligibility system. This law directed the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a health care management system in which veterans are enrolled according to a priority listing provided in the law. The law became effective October 1, 1998. In order for a veteran to receive services at any VA Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facility, all VHA facilities will need to know the enrollment status of a veteran. Therefore, a consolidated approval process is required to ensure uniform application of health benefits to veterans.

VHA began implementation of this law using Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VISTA) based applications. However, the consolidated approval process required is not yet in place. A dedicated managed care application must be developed and implemented to accomplish the full functionality of the mandated enrollment system. In July 1998, VHA published a request for proposal (RFP) for a National Enrollment Database (NED) system that will meet enrollment system requirements.

Because NED development and implementation required significant resources, the AAC formed a partnership with Federal Data Corporation (FDC), the current systems integration contractor for the AAC, and Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to develop a competitive proposal for the NED project. A detailed proposal was developed and forwarded to VHA in September 1998. In late September, the AAC submitted a best and final offer (BAFO) to VHA for the project.

On January 14, 1999, the AAC was formally notified that it was awarded the contract for the NED project. Work began immediately on the project and acquisition actions were initiated for the hardware/software platforms and equipment. A kickoff meeting with the AAC NED team and VHA representatives was held at the AAC on February 2-4, 1999, to discuss the contract requirements. Implementation of the NED is scheduled for November 1999.

Alternative Approach for IRM Approval

By: Ken Little, OI&T, IRM Planning, Acquisitions and Security Service

The Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) has developed an alternative approach to obtain Information Resources Management (IRM) approval to procure telecommunications (voice communication resources) workstations and servers. The alternative approach was coordinated and well received by VHA CIO and VBA CIO staff.

This approach has been streamlined to reduce the number of single acquisition requests submitted for

IRM approval, to reduce paperwork, and to reduce acquisition processing time in OI&T for granting IRM approval. It encourages up front planning from a VA-wide perspective without sacrificing the integrity of the IRM review. These new procedures provide the option of submitting to the OI&T an annual plan (AP) or following the current IRM approval process. The current process requires a single acquisition exceeding the \$250,000 threshold be submitted to OI&T, requesting IRM approval. The new procedures require submission of an AP that includes consolidated acquisition requirements by category, at the beginning of each fiscal year. Acquisition requirement categories include new or enhanced voice communication resources or state-of-the-art hardware and software for workstations and servers.

To further improve efficiency in the process, the electronic document management system (EDMS) will be used to transmit all requests for IRM approval, including an AP and supporting documentation. Security controls will be established in EDMS to safeguard sensitive information.

A consolidated AP, forwarded for IRM approval, must include the following:

- .. Consolidated security and contingency plans, a general statement of work, requirements analysis and cost benefits analysis that support desired acquisition requirements.

- .. Written concurrences from the Offices of Acquisitions and Materiel Management (93), Budget (041) and Telecommunications (045B2) or submit capital investment approval, if appropriate.

Upon contract award, the final statement of work (SOW) is required with actual implementation plans.

There are two exceptions to the IRM approval requirements. One is workstations and servers purchased under the Procurement of Computer Hardware and Software (PCHS) contract remain exempt from the IRM approval process. The other is IT acquisitions necessary to solve Year 2000 issues are delegated to the Administrations.

This new approach will be documented in detail in the new OI&T Acquisition Handbook scheduled for release in May 1999.



PCHS--VA's Ongoing Success

By: Fred Blumenthal, OI&T, Technology Integration Service

The Department can count many benefits and successes of the Procurement of Computer Hardware and Software (PCHS) Program now entering its third year. Both PCHS contractors, the Compaq Computer Corporation (Digital/Compaq) and Vanstar Government Systems (Vanstar/Inacom) offer leading edge desktop systems, notebooks, printers, peripherals, and the latest software and system options. Compared to other popular Federal contracts for these kinds of commercial items, including contracts in the proliferating blanket purchase acquisitions arena, the PCHS contracts offer the highest quality systems at the best prices.

Ordering from PCHS has been brisk over the first two years of the contract. As of December 31, 1998, total PCHS sales reached almost \$227 million. Included in these record sales were 63,466 desktop systems, 1,562 notebooks, 11,390 printers, and 596 servers.

Customer Satisfaction with PCHS remains high. The combined results of recently completed Digital/Compaq and Vanstar/Inacom Customer Satisfaction Surveys indicate overwhelming satisfaction with the contracts as 95% of all respondents reported that they would order again from PCHS.

PCHS product reliability is impressive. The overall failure rate for all desktop systems, notebooks, monitors, servers, and printers sold by both contractors through December 31, 1998, was a minimal 2.2%.

- ◆ Both contractors will customize system configurations to meet unique organizational requirements.

- ◆ The contracts contain provisions that allow the contractors to provide VA customers with the latest technology available.

- ◆ Contractor production facilities are ISO 9000 certified. This certification ensures that products ordered from PCHS are of the highest quality.

- ◆ PCHS offers one-stop shopping. There is no "go-between," "middleman," or central processing

office to delay orders and bog down delivery times. All orders are placed directly with the respective PCHS contractor for processing, integration, and delivery.

- ◆ Both contractors have dedicated program offices that solely support the PCHS contract and its customers.

- ◆ The contracts are flexible and allow special onetime buys for customers that desire products not currently on the contracts.

- ◆ All systems ordered from PCHS are Year **2000** compliant and meet all other applicable standards.

- ◆ Complete information on products available from the PCHS contracts can be found on each contractor's Internet web site. Digital/Compaq is at <http://www.usgov.digital.com> and Vanstar/Inacom at <http://www.inacomgov.com>. Vanstar/Inacom's Web site allows customers to build their own price quote.

- ◆ In June 1998, VA entered into an agreement with Microsoft, through the two PCHS contractors, which resulted in the Microsoft Custom License Agreement. This agreement provides VA access to most of the popular Microsoft desktop and server software products with automatic upgrades for four years. An immediate benefit of the Microsoft Custom License Agreement has been the installation of Microsoft Windows NT and Office 97 Professional software on all desktop systems at no additional charge to VA.

- ◆ To simplify and expedite the acquisition of products from PCHS, VA offices no longer require OIRM approval for PCHS procurements that exceed \$250,000.

For additional information please call the PCHS Program Office at 202-273-9510.

Hy Tech's Tip

By: Jay Anderson, OI&T, Technology
Integration Service



One of the most widely used techniques in the hacker's arsenal is called "Social Engineering" or "Pretext Phone Calls." The hacker calls employees, system administrators, or the help desk pretending to be an employee, and tries to get passwords or other information to gain access to VAs' most sensitive systems.

Under no circumstances will VA network or system administrators ever ask for your password—so give it to no one. If you are ever asked for your password by phone, e-mail, or even a system message, please report this to your local Information Security Officer (ISO) immediately.

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